

Lithuania

Facts and Statistics

Location: Eastern Europe, bordering Belarus 502 km, Latvia 453 km, Poland 91 km, Russia (Kaliningrad) 227 km

Capital: Vilnius

Population: 3,607,899 (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Lithuanian 80.6%, Russian 8.7%, Polish 7%, Belarusian 1.6%, other 2.1%

Religions: Roman Catholic (primarily), Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical Christian Baptist, Muslim, Jewish

Language in Lithuania

Since 1991, the official language of Lithuania is the Baltic language of Lithuanian, a language closely related to Latvian. More than 80% of the country's 3.8m population speaks Lithuanian as their first language. Minority languages include Belarusian (1.5%), Polish (7.7%), Russian (8%). Others, most notably Ukrainian and Yiddish make up a further 2.1%.

Lithuanian Culture & Society

The Family

- .The family is the centre of the social structure.
- .The obligation to family is a person's first priority.
- .Together with religion, the family forms the basis around which all other parts of life revolve.

The Role of Religion

- .The Roman Catholic Church has great influence on daily life.
- .The Catholic Church helped preserve the country's identity during the Soviet Union years.
- .The church's influence on the culture is seen in Lithuanian festivals, many of which are religious observances as well as in the celebration of name days rather than birthdays.
- .The church's influence is manifested in the respect for hierarchical relationships.

Customs and Etiquette in Lithuania

Meeting and Greeting

- The most common greeting is the handshake, with direct eye contact, and a smile.
- .Once a relationship has been established, greetings may become more unreserved and include a hug.
- .Wait for your Lithuanian friends to determine when your friendship has reached this level of intimacy.
- .People are addressed by their honorific title and their surname. Wait until invited before moving to a first name basis.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- .If invited to a Lithuanian's home, bring wine, flowers, or sweets to the hostess.
- .Give an odd number of flowers.
- .Do not give chrysanthemums - they are used in funerals.
- .Do not give white flowers - they are reserved for weddings.
- .Gifts are generally opened when received.

Dining Etiquette

- .Table manners are quite relaxed in Lithuania.
- .Wait to be told where to sit.
- .Table manners are Continental - hold the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating.
- .Always keep your hands visible when eating. Keep your wrists resting on the edge of the table.
- .Take small amounts of food initially so you may accept second helpings.
- .Try everything.
- .Napkins are kept on the table, not on the lap.
- .To indicate you have not finished eating, cross your knife and fork on your plate.
- .When you have finished eating, place your knife and fork across your plate with the prongs facing down and the handles facing to the right.
- .The host offers the first toast.
- .Toasting is generally done with hard liquor and not wine or beer.
- .You should reciprocate with your own toast later in the meal.